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SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT PREPARES TO MOVE ROHINGYAS FROM TEKNAF  
MAKESHIFT CAMP

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Plans to move nearly 10,000 illegal Rohingya refugees from a makeshift camp to higher ground are moving apace, according to representatives of the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management. The situation in the two official refugee camps has improved, particularly with regards to shelters and internal camp governance. END SUMMARY.

TEKNAF CAMP MOVE NEARLY READY

¶2. (SBU) In a meeting with representatives of the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management (MFDM) on July 17, we received an update on the government's plans to move approximately 10,000 illegal Rohingya "squatters" from a makeshift camp on the Naf River floodplain in Teknaf, south of Cox's Bazar to higher ground. Deputy Secretary Mohammad Ahsanul Jabbar, who heads the MFDM Rohingya Cell, told us the new location is seven kilometers closer to Cox's Bazar, and is safely away from the river. The last approval they are waiting on is from the Forestry Department, which controls the land. Jabbar said it should be coming within the next two weeks.

¶3. (SBU) Once approval by the Forestry Department is granted, the government will begin work on drainage and sanitation. Jabbar estimates that work will take approximately one month. He is hoping the Rohingyas can begin moving to the new location by end-August or early September, though he admitted it might be too optimistic.

¶4. (SBU) While the arrival of the monsoon season increases the risk of the present location flooding, it also makes the move logistically more complicated. The European Commission has promised aid to help resettle the Rohingyas, and United Nations (UN) agencies and non-governmental organizations like Medecins sans Frontieres (MSF) are also working closely with the government on the move. Because this is not an "official" Rohingya camp, UNHCR's formal role is limited, but it is providing advice and coordinating with the government.

CLOSE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOVERNMENT, UN

¶5. (SBU) The relationship between the Bangladesh government and international organizations and NGOs is continuing to improve, according to Jabbar. He expressed satisfaction -- even gratitude -- to the work of UNHCR in the two official camps, and said the government is committed to working with organizations to improve refugee conditions. He specifically cited the new shelters being built at Kutapolong and Nayapara

camps, as well as the education and training programs being started up.

¶16. (SBU) The new local MFDM representative (the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Coordinator -- RRRC) has worked to revamp the relationship with the local UNHCR office and to improve internal camp governance. Jabbar acknowledged unspecified "problems" with the previous RRRC who stepped down in August 2006. Under the new one, the relationship with the local UNHCR office and the camp leadership has been "transformed."

LOCAL CAMP GOVERNANCE CONTINUES TO IMPROVE  
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¶17. (SBU) A new "majlis" (local chiefs) system has been introduced. Many former majlis were appointed by the old RRRC, and were distrusted by the camp population. Some government officials were alleged to have extracted bribes from the old majlis, who in turn took the money from camp residents. Under the new system, majlis are chosen either by an informal but direct election, or with strong input by the camp population. "We can't say corruption is no longer present, but it is much, much less than before," according to Jabbar.

WORLD REFUGEE DAY AN "UNPRECEDENTED SUCCESS"  
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¶18. (SBU) In separate conversations, UNHCR's country representative Pia Pritz Phiri has endorsed Jabbar and expressed satisfaction with this new relationship with the government. At a recent meeting, she described how UNHCR

DHAKA 00001220 002 OF 002

celebrated World Refugee Day on June 20 in the camps for the first time. The government advisor responsible for MFDM, Tapan Chowdhury, was present, as were several other high-level officials. They spent time mingling with the refugees and hearing their concerns -- something unprecedented and "difficult to imagine" a year ago, according to Pritz-Phiri.

COMMENT: PROGRESS CONTINUES APACE  
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¶19. (SBU) The change in heart by the government actually started under the last government, after increased pressure by diplomats including the Ambassador. The interim government has taken this cooperation to new levels, however, and demonstrated a commitment to relieving at least the immediate humanitarian concerns that have made the Rohingya camps among the worst refugee camps in the world, according to the UN's own assessment.

¶10. (SBU) Timelines often slip in Bangladesh, however, so we will monitor the move from Teknaf closely and keep up our regular meetings with the government frequently to demonstrate our continued interest in the situation.

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